

An Unexpected Exchange

by Nom de Plume

Severus offers a rare word of encouragement.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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She was slumped over in her chair, face in hands, whiskey bottle (opened) beside her. Above, a dimly lit, iron chandelier full of candles flickered meekly, at only half-capacity.

Her riotous mane of hair, which had been rather tame earlier today, was now falling in twists and snarls around her shoulders and forearms.

Severus had passed by her office on his way to the Headmistress to report on his first day of the new term when he'd caught a glimpse of her melancholy form at her desk and paused.

He took a step or two backward and slowly peeked in to observe, with only a little satisfaction, that the headstrong know-it-all appeared to have cracked.

He watched quietly as she shook her head in disbelief and rubbed at her closed eyes with the heels of her palms.

Hair cascading forward, blocking her view of him no doubt, she raised a pale, weary hand to the whiskey bottle and poured a couple of fingers' worth of liquid into the crystal glass beside it.

Severus smirked. Not such a goody-two-shoes after all.

"I'm a failure," she said quietly to no one in particular.

Severus' smug grin faded a bit.

He wasn't sure why he'd bothered to intrude upon her in the first place, nor why he felt a momentary stab of understanding, but nevertheless found that he was compelled to say something. It wasn't completely heartfelt, but was at least sympathetic.

"Everyone has an awful first day teaching, Miss Granger."

She jerked in her seat and peered up at him from her cocoon of self-inflicted misery.

After a moment of surprised silence, she nodded and cast her gaze back to her new, thus still elegantly ordered desk.

"Did you?" she asked with resignation.

Severus regarded her dispassionately, but nodded upon reflection.

"As I say, everyone has an awful first day." He turned from her doorway and made to continue on to his previous destination, but paused again.

This sort of behaviour wasn't his customary way, but he'd once been the youngest on staff too, and he remembered how horrifying and inept he'd felt on his first day. And knowing her proclivity for tenaciousness and simple bull-headedness, Severus felt he should attempt to begin his professional relationship with Hermione Granger on the positive. Not that it really mattered either way, but he could at least tell Minerva he'd been civil when she would undoubtedly ask later.

"Depending on your *definition*," he almost sneered, "it does get better. With time."

Hermione looked up at him, somewhat startled.

"Really?" she whispered.

He half-raised an eyebrow and nodded once more.

Gathering his robes about him, he turned again to depart.

"Try not to wallow too much. I can't stand emotional females," he sniped, not harshly, and continued on his way back down the corridor.

Thanks to the magnificent Karelia for the beta. Originally posted at [hpcon_envy](#) on lj.